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VCU Menorah Review

*For the Enrichment of Jewish Thought*

Winter/Spring 2010 no. 72

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## A Philosopher Rediscovered His Jewish Roots

***Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life: Rosenzweig, Buber, Levinas, Wittgenstein* by Hilary Putnam: Indiana University Press.**

A review essay by Cliff Edwards

Hilary Putnam retired from Harvard in 2000 after over 30 years teaching philosophy of science and ethics there. In his last few years at Harvard he began teaching a course in Jewish philosophy, and that course provided content for his Helen and Martin Schwartz Lectures in Jewish Studies at Indiana University that comprise this little volume of just over 100 pages. The book includes an autobiographical element, as it had its origins in Putnam joining a “minyan” when one of his sons announced in 1975 that he wanted to have a bar mitzvah. Putnam was led by his son’s request to a renewed interest in his Jewish heritage, and this has led him to a continuing struggle to reconcile his life as philosopher and as religious Jew.

Rosenzweig, Buber, and Levinas are for Putnam the great Jewish philosophers of the twentieth century. As their thought has intrigued him in his struggle with his Jewish heritage, he wrote this slim volume to “help a reader who is struggling with these difficult authors to understand their difficult and spiritually deep writings.” (100) He adds the philosopher Wittgenstein to the mix, as he finds in Wittgenstein certain similarities to the philosophy of Rosenzweig found in two Rosenzweig works of the 1930’s, *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy* and *The Star of Redemption*. Though Putnam finds Rosenzweig’s negativity towards religions other than Judaism and Christianity “unfortunate” (35), he values Rosenzweig’s attack on a philosophical quest for essences, and finds value in his call for an existential philosophy he calls “the new thinking,” an “experiential, narrative philosophy,” a “deep-going way of life” with resemblances to the approach of Kierkegaard. (40)

Turning to an interpretation of Martin Buber’s “I and You” (rejecting “Thou” as too formal a translation for “Du”), Putnam focuses on Buber’s replacing “theorizing about God” with “speaking to God.” (65)

He identifies misunderstandings of Buber, explaining that the I-You relation is not always good, and I-It relation is not always bad. An I-You relation to a tyrant might be demonic, while I-It relations can be transformed and so serve the I-You in the world.

Levinas, the Lithuanian Orthodox Jew, presents Putnam with numerous difficulties in interpretation, but obviously attracts him. Ethics as “first philosophy” for Levinas calls upon us to present ourselves to others in an asymmetrical relation that obliges us to be available to “the neediness of others” without our expecting a reciprocal service from the “Other.” Ethics therefore is based on an “infinite obligation” to the other, the “other” substituting for God, transforming predicates to the other that traditional theology ascribes to God. (80)

Putnam does not provide an easy understanding of these philosophers. Those who wish a “simpler” summary along with a glimpse of Putnam’s own standpoint might go directly to the nine pages of the “Afterword.” There he locates himself “somewhere between John Dewey in *A Common Faith* and Martin Buber.” (100) Like Dewey, he does not believe in an afterlife or in “God as a supernatural helper.” (102) God is a living ideal as in Dewey, yet Putnam finds a “miraculous” element in the rituals and texts of Judaism, in the “I-You” relationship, and in natural beauty and art. The centrality of addressing God rather than theorizing about God, infinite obligation to the other, and experiential philosophy as a way of life as he locates them in Rosenzweig, Buber, Levinas, and Wittgenstein, all are critical elements in Putnam’s continuing struggle to relate his philosophical concerns and his religious nature.

*Cliff Edwards is a professor at Virginia Commonwealth University and consulting editor of Menorah Review.*

## An Extraordinary Rabbinic Life

***Joachim Prinz, Rebellious Rabbi. An Autobiography the German and Early American Years. Edited and with an introduction by Michael A. Meyers***

A review essay by Matthew Schwartz

Rabbi Dr. Joachim Prinz was a gifted raconteur, confident though not confessional, positive though not triumphant, engaging but serious. The American reader who knows some American Jewish history will find the last section more familiar while the first two sections fascinate like a top historical novel. We come to know both Jewish life in Germany and Rabbi Prinz's personal experience. According to Professor Michael A. Meyers's excellent introduction, Dr. Prinz dictated this autobiography to his secretary around 1977, shortly after retiring from the pulpit of Temple B'nai Abraham in Newark, New Jersey. It remains close to oral form, and it does not seem that Dr. Prinz edited it. Meyers edited the text, and added many brief notes, usually identifying names or explaining religious practices. The narrative ends in 1948, with Dr. Prinz still in his mid-forties. The last event is the passing of Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, whom Dr. Prinz admired as mentor. Dr. Prinz would continue to play a noticeable role in the U.S., including an oration at Martin Luther King's famous Washington D.C. rally in August, 1963.

Dr. Prinz's account of his first years is riveting. "The village in which I was born cannot be found on any map" an Upper Silesian village of 900 residents far closer to the Medieval world than to our own fast moving age of computers and cell phones. The peasants were serfs who depended on the count who lived in an eighteenth century chateau. They would bow their heads as his carriage drawn by four horses would rush through the village.

No other Jews lived there and, as a child, Joachim was often taken by maids to the local Catholic church. He could remember being in a synagogue only once. His house had a Christmas tree and almost nothing Jewish except some special foods for Passover. Prinz is open and matter of fact about the sex games he played with the family's maids as

a little boy, as well as his far from monogamous adulthood. In all, he retained pleasant impressions of a certain regularity of life. After several years, the family moved to Oppeln, a town of 35,000, where there were better schools, and where he first saw water faucets, flush toilets and gas lights.

Young Prinz was not close to his father. His grandfather, whom he did not know, was probably Orthodox in practice, but the father seems unstable in his own religious practice as well as coldly strict with his own family. Only a few of the 200 Jewish families in Oppeln kept kosher, and the father would eat every day a second breakfast invariably including ham. There was little religious observance in the house. Yet the father knew Hebrew and, strangely, would regularly don tefilin. A rabbi of Oppeln wrote a book arguing against the observance of the dietary laws. Nevertheless, in the synagogue, the women sat segregated in a balcony. The young boy received little warmth from the father, and once when the boy came home with a subpar report card, the father punished him by smashing his beloved violin.

His mother was a warmer person, and her death in childbirth when Joachim was only ten, was imaginably difficult for him. It is not surprising that the boy sought meaning in religion, and by age 15 he was deeply involved in Judaism, mentored by Felix Goldmann the town's young rabbi. Dr. Prinz describes their early morning journeys to deliver food to the poor, both Jews and non-Jews. He describes too how once he held the Torah scroll, and the soft wrapping reminded him of his mother. "Torah and mother became one." (p. 35). Although he would turn more liberal later, at that age he found the Reformed services empty and shallow, and he often attended the more fervent Seventh Day Adventist service on Friday nights. The assimilation of the Jews of Oppeln left a void in him, and he devoted himself to Jewish study and to Zionism. He would eat no meat in his non-kosher home, nor would he ring the door bell nor carry books on the Sabbath.

The account of the Jewish seminary at Breslau is memorable, especially the stories of the prodigious scholarship of Professor Horowitz,

whose daughter Prinz later married. Horowitz knew not only much of the Talmud by heart but astounded a non-Jewish professor by quoting by heart twenty pages of Aristotle to support a viewpoint he was arguing. Other professors too were noteworthy for both learning and personality, like Hans Loewy. As was the custom, Prinz earned a Ph.D. from a university as well as the seminary ordination.

Berlin was an exciting city in the 1920's, liberal, cultured and creative, where virginity was frowned upon, but it was a dream world. Democracy was simply not for the Germans, and anti-semitism grew, pointing toward Nazism. As a young rabbi in Berlin, Prinz was certainly innovative. He focused on the youngsters, even taking them skating, and he was an outspoken Zionist, despite the opposition of many community bigwigs. He claims to have recognized the real threat of Hitler by the late 1920's, far earlier than anyone else. As the numbers of storm troopers and swastikas increased, "I knew that Hitler had conquered Germany." Indeed, things began to grow worse for the Jews as soon as Hitler came to power in 1933. Jews were forced in on themselves, and Prinz describes the new intense feeling of the Sabbath prayer services. When Dr. Prinz offered a course in Jewish History, 7000 people showed up.

Prinz continued to express his views on the Nazis with reckless freedom and was in fact called in for questioning by the Gestapo several times. He was able to befriend a Gestapo officer who was assigned to watch the services at his synagogue. As the Nazis took over full control of Germany, the Jews were unable or unwilling to respond. That Prinz was not killed by the Nazis, he saw as due to divine protection, and he openly called for emigration as the only possible solution. Jews had felt themselves very deeply a part of German society, but that now proved to be an illusion. Jewish leaders refused to recognize the changes in what they saw as *their* Germany. It is notable that the universities were particular hotbeds of anti-Semitism.

The danger to Dr. Prinz personally increased. He visited the United States in 1936 and was accused afterward by the Gestapo of sabo-



taging the Hindenburg. Later, he was asked by the Gestapo to spy for them in the United States. After many difficulties, Prinz and his family were able to migrate to America. Adolph Eichmann came to keep watch at Dr. Prinz's farewell sermon.

America was quite a culture shock for the Prinz family. Dr. Prinz found American rabbis mediocre and not too educated. They tried hard but with little success to attract people, and services were poorly attended. Organized Jewish life he found to be dominated by leaders who were wealthy but Jewishly illiterate. They had little idea of what was happening in Europe.

There are interesting anecdotes about how Dr. Prinz converted the English girl who would marry David Ben-Gurion's son. The elder Mrs. Ben-Gurion would later refer to her as the best Jew in the family. Mrs. Orde Wingate was another acquaintance. Dr. Prinz was at the U.N. for the partition vote that helped launch the State of Israel. In London, he met the messenger who had delivered the original Balfour Declaration from Lord Balfour to Lord Rothschild thirty years earlier.

Dr. Prinz was particularly devoted to Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, who had been very helpful to him, and the reader will feel that the book ends in *medias res* with Rabbi Wise's passing.

This is the first book on the life and career of Joachim Prinz. It is a great read.

*Matthew Schwartz is a professor in the history department of Wayne State University and a contributing editor.*

## An Interpretation of Isaiah 6.8-10

By Isabelle Taylor

God said to Isaiah (6.8-10)  
*Go, say to the people,  
Hear, indeed, but do not understand;  
See, indeed, but do not grasp.  
Dull that people's mind,  
Stop its ears,  
And seal its eyes--  
Lest, seeing with its eyes  
And hearing with its ears,  
It also grasp with its mind,  
And repent and save itself*

This passage has always been troublesome. It clearly states that Isaiah should not help his people understand or learn about the dangers they face, as if their free will has been removed so there is no possibility of their return to God. One interpretation is that these words come to the prophet when he is old and disillusioned. This is the distressing result of a prophetic ministry that he believes has failed. The problem with this interpretation is that the words come to Isaiah immediately after he has been chosen by God to be a prophet.

I would offer another interpretation. The words relate to a spiritual experience without the ego or sense of self "getting in the way" the purest, most direct and simple kind of experience, not unlike the idealization of the wilderness period when the Hebrews were in direct relationship with God. But the moment the idea of "self" enters the relationship, the mind begins to grasp for answers and gratification. It is then that it would repent to save itself, meaning that the individual would try to save his own being instead of thinking of the greater good of justice and compassion for all, especially for the oppressed and vulnerable. At the beginning of Isaiah's ministry, therefore, God is giving him a mission virtually impossible: to instill within his people a faith so pure and immediate that it is not compromised by the ego.

*Isabelle Taylor is president of the Virginia Commonwealth University Philosophy Club.*

## Books in Brief: New and Notable

*Testimony, Tensions, and Tikkun: Teaching the Holocaust in Colleges and Universities*, edited and introduced by Myrna Goldenberg and Rochelle L. Millen. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

The Holocaust has been forcing scholars for more than 60 years to assess its impact on their disciplines. Educators whose work is represented in this volume ask their students to grapple with one of the grand horrors of the 20th century and to accept the responsibility of building a more just, peaceful world (*tikkun olam*). They acknowledge that their task as teachers of the Holocaust is both imperative and impossible; they must teach something that cannot be taught, as one contributor puts it, and they recognize the formidable limits of language, thought, imagination, and comprehension that thwart and obscure the story they seek to tell. Yet they are united in their keen sense of pursuing an effort that is pivotal to our understanding of the past, and to whatever prospects we may have for a more decent and humane future. A Holocaust course refers to an instructional offering that may focus entirely on the Holocaust; may serve as a touchstone in a larger program devoted to genocide studies; or may constitute a unit within a wider curriculum, including art, literature, ethics, history, religious studies, jurisprudence, philosophy, theology, film studies, Jewish studies, German studies, composition, urban studies, or architecture. It may also constitute a main thread that runs through an interdisciplinary course. The first section of *Testimony, Tensions, and Tikkun* can be read as an injunction to teach and act in a manner consistent with a profound cautionary message: that there can be no tolerance for moral neutrality about the Holocaust, and that there is no subject in the humanities or social sciences where its shadow has not reached. The second section is devoted to the process and nature of students' learning. These chapters describe efforts to guide students through terrain that hides cognitive and emotional land mines. The authors examine their responsibility to foster students' personal connection with the events of the Holocaust, but in such a way that they not instill hopelessness

about the future. The third and final section moves the subject of the Holocaust out of the classroom and into broader institutional settings: universities and community colleges and their surrounding communities, along with museums and memorial sites. For the educators represented here, teaching itself is testimony. The story of the Holocaust is one that the world will fail to master at its own peril.

*Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations* by Martin Goodman. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Publisher.

In 70 CE, after a four-year war, three Roman legions besieged and eventual devastated Jerusalem, destroying Herod's Temple. Sixty years later, after further violent rebellions and the city's final destruction, Hadrian built the new city of Aelia Capitolina where Jerusalem had once stood. Jews were barred from entering its territory. They were taxed simply for being Jewish. They were forbidden to worship their God. They were wholly reviled.

What brought about this conflict between the Romans and the subjects they had previously treated with tolerance? Martin Goodman examines this conflict, its causes, and its consequences with unprecedented authority and thoroughness. He delineates the incompatibility between the cultural, political, and religious beliefs and practices of the two peoples. He explains how Rome's interests were served by a policy of brutality against the Jews. He makes clear how the original Christians first distanced themselves from their origins, and then became increasingly hostile toward Jews as Christian influence spread within the empire. The book thus also offers an exceptional account of the origins of anti-Semitism, the history of which still reverberates.

*Remembering Abraham: Culture, Memory, and History in the Hebrew Bible* by Ronald Hendel.

New York: Oxford University Press.

According to an old tradition preserved in the Palestinian Targums, the Hebrew Bible is the Book of Memories. The sacred past recalled in the

Bible serves as a model and wellspring for the present. The remembered past, says Ronald Hendel, is the material with which biblical Israel constructed its identity as a people, a religion, and a culture. It is a mixture of history, collective memory, folklore, and literary brilliance, and is often colored by political and religious interests. In Israel's formative years, these memories circulated orally in the context of family and tribe. Over time they came to be crystallized in various written texts. The Hebrew Bible is a vast compendium of writings, spanning a thousand-year period from roughly the twelfth to the second century BCE, and representing perhaps a small slice of the writings of that period. The texts are often overwritten by later texts, creating a complex pastiche of text, reinterpretation, and commentary. The religion and culture of ancient Israel are expressed by these texts, and in no small part also created by them, as they formulate new or altered conceptions of the sacred past. *Remembering Abraham* explores the interplay of culture, history, and memory in the Hebrew Bible. Hendel examines the Hebrew Bible's portrayal of Israel and its history, and correlates the biblical past with our own sense of the past. He addresses the ways that culture, memory, and history interweave in the self-fashioning of Israel's identity, and in the biblical portrayals of the patriarchs, the Exodus, and King Solomon. A concluding chapter explores the broad horizons of the biblical sense of the past. This accessibly written book represents the mature thought of one of our leading scholars of the Hebrew Bible.

This book is the first to explore fully the role that Zionism played in the political thought of Winston Churchill. Michael Makovsky traces the development of Churchill's positions toward Zionism from the period leading up to the First World War through his final years as prime minister in the 1950s. Setting Churchill's attitudes toward Zionism within the context of his overall worldview as well as within the context of 20th-century British diplomacy, Makovsky offers a unique contribution to our understanding of Churchill.

Moving chronologically, the book looks at Churchill's career within the context of several major themes: his own worldview and political strat-

egies, his understanding of British imperial interests, the moral impact of the Holocaust, his commitment to ideals of civilization, and his historical sentimentalism. While Churchill was largely sympathetic to the Jews and to the Zionist impulse, he was not without inconsistencies in his views and policies over the years. Makovsky's book illuminates key aspects of Middle Eastern history; Zionist history; and British political, imperial, and diplomatic history; and further helps us understand one of the pivotal figures of the 20th century.

*Culture Front: Representing Jews in Eastern Europe*, edited by Benjamin Nathans and Gabriella Safran. Philadelphia: Penn Press.

For most of the last four centuries, the broad expanse of territory between the Baltic and the Black Seas, known since the Enlightenment as Eastern Europe, has been home to the world's largest Jewish population. The Jews of Poland, Russia, Lithuania, Galicia, Romania, and Ukraine were prodigious generators of modern Jewish culture. Their volatile blend of religious traditionalism and precocious quests for collective self-emancipation lies at the heart of *Culture Front*.

This volume brings together contributions by both historians and literary scholars to take readers on a journey across the cultural history of East European Jewry from the mid-17th century to the present. The articles collected here explore how Jews and their Slavic neighbors produced and consumed imaginative representations of Jewish life in chronicles, plays, novels, poetry, memoirs, museums and more.

*Culture Front* puts culture at the forefront of analysis, treating verbal artistry itself as a kind of frontier through which Jews and Slavs imagined, experienced, and negotiated with themselves and each other. The book's four sections investigate the distinctive themes of that frontier: violence and civility, popular culture, politics and aesthetics, and memory. The result is a fresh exploration of ideas and movements that helped change the landscape of modern Jewish history.

*Resurrection: The Power of God for Christians and Jews* by Kevin J. Madigan and Jon D. Levenson. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Written for religious and nonreligious people alike in clear and accessible language, the authors explore a teaching central to both Jewish and Christian traditions: the teaching that at the end of time God will cause the dead to live again. Although this expectation, known as the resurrection of the dead, is widely understood to have been a part of Christianity from its beginnings nearly 2000 years ago, many people are surprised to learn that the Jews believed in resurrection long before the emergence of Christianity. In this sensitively written and historically accurate book, Madigan and Levenson aim to clarify confusion and dispel misconceptions about Judaism, Jesus, and Christian origins.

*A History of Modern Israel* by Colin Shindler. West Nyack, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Shindler's book traces Israel's history across sixty years, from its optimistic beginnings - immigration, settlement, the creation of its towns and institutions - through the wars with its Arab neighbours, and the confrontation with the Palestinians. Shindler paints a broad canvas which affords unusual insights into this multicultural society, forged from over a hundred different Jewish communities and united by a common history. Despite these commonalities, however, Israel in the 21st century is riven by ideological disputes and different interpretations of Jewishness and Judaism. Nowhere are these divisions more revealingly portrayed than in the lives and ideologies of Israel's leaders. Biographical portraits of Ben Gurion, Israel's first prime-minister, Yitzhak Rabin, whose assassination is still a traumatic memory for many Israelis, and the controversial Ariel Sharon, offer fascinating examinations of those who have led the country to where it is today. Shindler offers unusual insights into this multicultural society, forged from over a hundred different Jewish communities and united by a common history.

*Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life* by Hilary Putnam. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Putnam questions the thought of three major Jewish philosophers



of the 20th century Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, and Emmanuel Levinas to help him reconcile the philosophical and religious sides of his life. An additional presence in the book is Ludwig Wittgenstein who, although not a practicing Jew, thought about religion in ways that Putnam juxtaposes to the views of Rosenzweig, Buber, and Levinas. Putnam explains the leading ideas of each of these great thinkers, bringing out what, in his opinion, constitutes the decisive intellectual and spiritual contributions of each of them. Although the religion discussed is Judaism, the depth and originality of these philosophers, as incisively interpreted by Putnam, make their thought nothing less than a guide to life.

*The Jewish Bible: JPS Guide*, prepared by multiple authors, is an invaluable companion to the Hebrew Bible, providing readers with ready access to important facts and Bible basics: how the Bible became the Bible, its origins, content, and organization; distinctions between the Jewish Bible (*Tanach*) and Christian Bibles; a short history of Bible translations and how they differ; Bible commentaries; storytelling, poetry, law, prophecy, and Wisdom literature; popular methods of Bible study; finding meaning through midrash. In addition, there are summaries of all the biblical books; dozens of text boxes; an extensive glossary of Bible terms, places, and people; maps, charts, and tables; and large foldout timelines and family trees.

*Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution* by Ian Kershaw. Yale University Press.

This volume brings together the most important and influential aspects of Kershaw's research on the Holocaust for the first time. The writings are arranged in three sections: Hitler and the Final Solution, popular opinion and the Jews in Nazi Germany, and the Final Solution in historiography. Kershaw provides an introduction and a closing section on the uniqueness of Nazism and on war and violence in 20th and 21st century Europe.

*Hebrew Writers on Writing*, edited by Peter Cole. San Antonio: Trinity

University Press.

The anthology offers a fresh look at well-known figures such as Haim Nahman Bialik and Yehuda Amichai, and also introduces to English a host of fascinating yet little- or never before translated writers. It explores, as no English volume has done before, the shifting cultural and political landscape out of which the literature emerges and provides an intimate vision of a startlingly rich and diverse body of work.

*The Catholic Church and the Jews, Argentina, 1933-1945* by Gabriela Ben-Dror. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

The impact of events in Nazi Germany and Europe was keenly felt in neutral Argentina among its predominantly Catholic population and its significant Jewish minority. The author considers the images of Jews presented in standard Catholic teaching of that era, the attitudes of the lower clergy and faithful toward the country's Jewish citizens, and the response of the politically influential Church hierarchy to the national debate on accepting Jewish refugees from Europe. The issue was complicated by such factors as the position taken by the Vatican, Argentina's unstable political situation, and the sizeable number of citizens of German origin who were Nazi sympathizers eager to promote German interests.

*New Age Judaism*, edited by Celia E. Rothenberg and Anne Vallely. Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell.

Experimentation with yoga, drumming, meditation, eclectic musical forms, Buddhism, and egalitarian prayer were once the province of the most marginal of Jewish religious practices. Today, however, they are being embraced with varying degrees of enthusiasm within mainstream Jewish denominations, revealing the gradual normalization of New Age Judaism's religious forms. *New Age Judaism* focuses much-needed scholarly attention on these new forms and expressions of Judaism both within and outside of the synagogue setting.

*Memories of Jewish Life: From Italy to Jerusalem, 1918-1960* by Au-

gusto Segre. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

In this lyrical memoir, Augusto Segre not only recounts his rich life experiences but also evokes the changing world of Italian Jewry in the 20th century. Raised in the traditional Jewish community of Casale Monferrato in the former ghetto, Segre depicts the changes wrought on his people by emancipation, fascism, world wars, and the Holocaust. The trend of Italian Jews toward assimilation was evident in Segre's time, and an awareness of it pervades this work, providing a rare glimpse into a traditional, religious, and vibrant working-class Jewish community that no longer exists.

*Jewishness and the Human Dimension* by Jonathan Boyarin. New York: Fordham University Press.

The essays in this book are an important contribution to understanding the modern identity of Jewishness. It is the author's report on an effort to bring Jewishness, broadly construed, into dialogue with a wide range of thought in contemporary criticism, while linking those themes in turn to the question of planetary crisis.

*Crisis, Revolution, and Russian Jews* by Jonathan Frankel. New York: Cambridge University Press.

This collection of essays examines the politicization and the politics of the Jewish people in the Russian empire during the late tsarist period. The focal point is the Russian revolution of 1905, when the political mobilization of the Jewish youth took on massive proportions, producing a cohort of radicalized activists committed to socialism, nationalism, or both. Frankel describes the dynamics of 1905 and the leading role of the intelligentsia as revolutionaries, ideologues, and observers. But he also looks backward to the emergent stage of modern Jewish politics in both Russia and the West and forward to the part played by the veterans of 1905 in Palestine and the United States.

*Jewish Philanthropy and Enlightenment in Late-Tsarist Russia* by Brian Horowitz. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

The Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia (OPE) was a philanthropic organization, the oldest Jewish organization in Russia. Founded by a few wealthy Jews in St. Petersburg who wanted to improve opportunities for Jewish people in Russia by increasing their access to education and modern values, OPE was secular and nonprofit. The group emphasized the importance of modern education both for the unity of Jewish culture and to help Jews integrate themselves into Russian society by opening, supporting, and subsidizing schools throughout the country. This book offers a model of individuals and institutions struggling with the concern so central to contemporary Jews in America and around the world: how to retain a strong Jewish identity while fully integrating into modern society.

*We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945-1962* by Hasia R. Diner. New York University Press.

It was an accepted truth that after World War II, American Jews chose to be silent about the mass murder of millions of their European brothers and sisters at the hands of the Nazis. The Jewish community simply did not memorialize the Holocaust until the Eichmann trial. In a compelling work, Diner shows this assumption of silence to be categorically false. Uncovering a rich and varied trove of remembrances, her new book shows that publicly memorializing those who died in the Holocaust arose from a deep and powerful element of Jewish life in postwar America. She marshals enough evidence to dismantle the idea of American Jewish forgetfulness and brings to life the moving and manifold ways that this widely diverse group paid tribute to the tragedy. Her book radically alters our understanding not only of postwar American Jewry, but of the ways that the Holocaust and the 1960s alike continue to reverberate in our lives.

*The Making of Modern Israel, 1948-1967* by Leslie Stein. Malden, MA: The Polity Press.

On May 14, 1948 the State of Israel was declared by David Ben-Gurion

at a small gathering assembled in the main hall of the Tel Aviv Museum. Within a time frame of 19 years, culminating in the Six-Day War, Israel fought three separate wars and within its first four years, thanks to mass immigration, its population doubled. Furthermore, Israel had been confronted with acute economic difficulties, intra-Jewish ethnic tensions, a problematic Arab minority and a secular-religious divide. Apart from defense issues, Israel faced a generally hostile or, at best, indifferent international community rendering it hard pressed in securing great power patronage or even official sympathy and understanding. Based on a wide range of sources, both in Hebrew and English, this book contains a judicious synthesis of the received literature to yield the general reader and student alike a reliable, balanced, and novel account of Israel's fateful and turbulent beginnings.

*Religion or Ethnicity? Jewish Identities in Evolution*, edited by Zvi Gitelman. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Leading scholars trace the evolution of Jewish identity and examine Judaism from the Greco-Roman age through medieval times, modern western and eastern Europe, to today. Jewish identity has been defined as an ethnicity, a nation, a culture, and even a race. This book questions what it means to be Jewish. The contributions show how the Jewish people have evolved over time in different ethnic, religious, and political movements.

*Tropical Zion: General Trujillo, FDR, and the Jews of Sosua* by Allen Wells. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

750 Jewish refugees fled Nazi Germany and founded the agricultural settlement of Sosua in the Dominican Republic, then ruled by one of Latin America's most repressive dictators. Wells tells the compelling story of General Trujillo, Franklin Roosevelt, and those fortunate pioneers who founded a successful employee-owned dairy cooperative on the north shore of the island. At the Evian Conference in 1938, the Dominican Republic was the only nation that agreed to open its doors. Trujillo sought to whiten the Dominican populace, welcoming Jewish

refugees who were themselves subject to racist scorn in Europe. The Roosevelt administration sanctioned the Sosua colony. Wells weaves vivid narratives about the founding of Sosua, the original settlers and their families, and the life of the unconventional beach-front colony.

*From Empathy to Denial: Arab Responses to the Holocaust* by Meir Litvak and Ester Webman. New York: Columbia University Press.

The authors track the evolution of post-World War II perceptions of the Holocaust and their parallel emergence in the wake of the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1948. Following the establishment of the State of Israel, Arab attitudes toward the Holocaust became entangled with broader anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic sentiments. They track this discourse through the works of leading intellectuals. Their chronological history provides a remarkable perspective on the origins, development, and tenacity of anti-Holocaust belief.

*The Evolution of God* by Robert Wright. New York: Little, Brown and Company.

Wright develops a hidden pattern that the great monotheistic faiths have followed as they have evolved and one that reveals the key to harmony among the Abrahamic faiths. Taking the reader from the Stone Age to the Information Age, Wright overturns basic assumptions about the three religions. Rooting his research in archaeology, theology, and evolutionary psychology, his provocative findings are sure to inspire new debate.

*Pontius Pilate, Anti-Semitism, and the Passion in Medieval Art* by Colum Hourihane. Princeton University Press.

For the first time, Hourihane provides a complete look at the shifting visual and textual representations of Pilate throughout early Christian and medieval art. He examines neglected and sometimes sympathetic portrayals, and shows how negative characterizations of Pilate, which were developed for political and religious purposes, reveal the anti-Semitism of the medieval period. Combining a wealth of previously

unpublished sources with explorations of historical developments, this book puts forth for the first time an encyclopedic portrait of a complex legend.

*Refugees and Rescue: The Diaries and Papers of James G. McDonald 1935-1945*, edited by Richard Breitman et al. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

New evidence presented in this book challenges widely held opinions about Franklin D. Roosevelt's views on the rescue of European Jews before and during the Holocaust. The struggles of presidential confidant James G. McDonald, who resigned as League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in 1935, and his allies to transfer many of the otherwise doomed are disclosed here for the first time. Although McDonald's efforts as chairman of FDR's advisory committee on refugees from May 1938 until nearly the end of the war were hampered by the pervasive anti-Semitic attitudes of those years, fears about security, and changing presidential wartime priorities, tens of thousands did find haven. McDonald's 1935-1936 diary entries and the other primary sources presented here offer new insights into these conflicts and into Roosevelt's inconsistent attitudes toward the Jewish question in Europe.

*Jewish Sages of Today: Profiles of Extraordinary People*, edited by Aryeh Rubin. New York Devora Publishing.

Twenty-seven people who are making a profound and positive impact on the Jewish world are profiled. They are individuals who, through their Judaism and their relationship to their work, are living meaningful and purposeful lives, despite the many challenges of our times. They are an eclectic group, drawn from across the U.S. and Israel, from a variety of professions, and diverse in religious observance.

*The Passionate Torah: Sex and Judaism*, edited by Danya Ruttenberg. New York University Press.

With incisive essays from contemporary rabbis, scholars, and writers,

this collection not only surveys the challenges that sexuality poses to Jewish belief, but also offers fresh new perspectives and insights on the changing place of sexuality within Jewish theology and Jewish lives. Topics covered, among others, are monogamy, interfaith relationships, reproductive technology, and homosexuality.

*Contemporary American Judaism: Transformation and Renewal* by Dana Evan Kaplan. New York: Columbia University Press.

While pessimists worry about the vanishing American Jew, Kaplan focuses on the creative responses to contemporary spiritual trends that have made a Jewish religious renaissance possible. He believes that the reorientation of American Judaism has been a bottom up process, resisted by elites who have only reluctantly responded to the demands of the spiritual marketplace. The American Jewish denominational structure is therefore weakening at the same time that religious experimentation is rising, leaving to innovative approaches that are supplanting existing institutions. The result is an exciting transformation of what it means to be a religious Jew in 21st century America.

*Jewish Musical Modernism, Old and New*, edited by Philip V. Bohlman. The University of Chicago Press.

This volume's contributors present a series of essays that trace the intersections of Jewish history and music from the rise of early modern Europe to the present. Covering the sacred and secular, the European and non-European, and all the domains where these realms converge, the essays recast the established history of Jewish culture and its influences on modernity. They expand the boundaries of the field to an unprecedented degree.

*Some Measure of Justice: The Holocaust Era Restitution Campaign of the 1990s* by Michael R. Marrus. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

During the 1990s, claimants and their lawyers sought to rectify the horrendous wrongs committed more than 50 years earlier. This book



explores the most recent wave of justice-seeking: why it emerged when it did, how it fits with earlier reparation to the Jewish people, its significance for the historical representation of the Holocaust, and its implications for justice-seeking in our time. Ultimate the author asks: What constitutes justice for a great historic wrong? And, is such justice possible?

*America's Prophet: Moses and the American Story* by Bruce Feiler. New York: William Morrow.

Feiler travels across the country to experience the influence of Moses firsthand. He sails on the trail of the pilgrims who quoted Moses on the Mayflower, climbs the bell tower of Independence Hall where the Liberty Bell bears a quote from Moses, uncovers the story of how Jefferson, Franklin, and Adams proposed Moses be on the seal of the United States, and so on. He shows that the country's affinity for Moses dates back to Columbus and has continued through every major social and political movement from the Revolution to the present.

*Far from Zion: In Search of a Global Jewish Community* by Charles London. New York: William Morrow.

London explains that he feels little connection to Judaism or its people until he goes on a year-long quest to seek out Jewish communities around the world. The journey is both physical and spiritual; he travels thousands of miles and explores the depths of his own soul. He is perplexed and fascinated by the longing for Zion; and equally intrigued by Jewish people in nations all over the world who choose to stay put, establishing strong roots among cultures where they are the clear minority. In the end, he is profoundly inspired by the people and communities he has met.

*The Arts of Intimacy: Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the Making of Castilian Culture* by Jerrilynn D. Dodds, Maria Rosa Menocal, and Abigail Krasner Balbale. Yale University Press.

This lavishly illustrated book explores the vibrant interaction among

different and sometimes opposing cultures, and how their contacts with one another transformed them all. It chronicles the tumultuous history of Castile in the wake of the Christian capture of the Islamic city of Tylaytula, now Toledo, in the 11th century and traced the development of Castilian culture as it was forged in the new intimacy of Christians with the Muslims and Jews they had overcome.

*Torah Queeries: Weekly Commentaries on the Hebrew Bible*, edited by Gregg Drinkwater, Joshua Lesser, and David Shneer. New York University Press.

*The Making of a Reform Jewish Cantor: Musical Authority, Cultural Investment* by Judah M. Cohen. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Cohen provides an unprecedented look into the meaning of attaining musical authority among American Reform Jews at the turn of the 21st century. How do aspiring cantors adapt traditional musical forms to the practices of contemporary American congregations? What is the cantor's role in American Jewish religious life today? Cohen follows cantorial students at the School of Sacred Music over the course of their training, as they prepare to become modern Jewish musical leaders. Opening a window on the practical, social, and cultural aspects of aspiring to musical authority, this book provides unusual insights into issues of musical tradition, identity, gender, community, and high and low musical culture.

*Ann Frank: Her Life in Words and Pictures* by Menno Metselaar and Ruud van der Rol. New York: Roaring Book Press.

This book is an indispensable guide to her tragic but inspiring story. It is a beautifully designed and elegantly crafted book as a stand-alone introduction to Anne's life and a photographic companion to a classic of Holocaust literature.

*The Atheist and the God Particle* by Edwin Eugene Klingman. San Gregorio, CA: Ekom Publishing.

Atheism relies heavily on science for self-justification, but the God

Particle has been a missing link. Scientists currently believe the Large Hadron Collider is sufficient to find the particle if it exists. So if it cannot be found, there will be serious implications for a larger sector of physics and for atheists, which is discussed at length in this book. While most popular atheistic books are simply attacks on religion with little insight into the meaning and foundation of atheistic beliefs, the author spends considerable effort defining the atheist's belief system. He further examines the influence of these beliefs on science, philosophy, and society. For those who are serious about the implications of atheism, either pro or con, this book is essential to understand the significance of the God Particle concept.

*The Holocaust: A Concise History* by Doris L. Bergen. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

In examining one of the defining events of the 20th century, Bergen situates the Holocaust in its historical, political, social, cultural, and military contexts. Unlike many other treatments of the Holocaust, this history traces not only the persecution of the Jews, but also other segments of society victimized by the Nazis: Gypsies, homosexuals, Poles, Soviet POWs, the disabled and other groups deemed undesirable. With clear and eloquent prose, Bergen explores the two interconnected goals that drove the Nazi program of conquest and genocide purification of the so-called Aryan race and expansion of its living space and discusses how these goals affected the course of World War II. Including illustrations and firsthand accounts from perpetrators, victims and eyewitnesses, the book is immediate, human, and eminently readable.

*Post-Zionism, Post-Holocaust: Three Essays on Denial, Forgetting, and the Delegitimation of Israel* by Elhanan Yakira. New York: Cambridge University Press.

The common theme of the author's three essays is the uses and abuses of the Holocaust as an ideological arm in the anti-Zionist campaigns. The first essay examines the French group of left-wing Holocaust deniers. The second deals with a number of Israeli academics

and intellectuals, the so-called post-Zionists, and tries to follow their use of the Holocaust in their different attempts to demonize and delegitimize Israel. The third deals with Hannah Arendt and her relations with Zionism and the State of Israel. Yakira argues that each of these is a particular expression of an outrage: anti-Zionism and a wholesale delegitimation of Israel.

*Why the Dreyfus Affair Matters* by Louis Begley. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Begley dissects the prosecution of Dreyfus, teasing apart a web of lies, forgeries, and virulent prejudice. Bringing into focus the details of this famously complicated case, he illuminate remarkable parallels with our own time; questions raised by the Dreyfus case hold new relevance. As we struggle with the moral, legal and political issues at hand, Begley's book warns us that the Dreyfus Affair really does matter.

## Moreshet: From the Classics

Rabbi Eliezer brought forth several proofs for an argument in the academy, but his rabbinical colleagues did not agree with him. He then said to them: "If the law agrees with me, let that locust tree prove it!" Immediately the locust tree flew out of the soil where it was rooted. His colleagues said to him: "No proof can be brought from a locust tree!" Then Eliezer spoke to them again: "If the law agrees with me, let that stream of water prove it!" Immediately, the stream of water began to flow backward. His colleagues again said: "No proof can be brought from a stream." Then Eliezer said: "If the law agrees with me, let the walls of this academy prove it!" Immediately the walls of the academy leaned over as if they were about to fall. And before his colleagues spoke again, Eliezer said: "If the law agrees with me, let heaven itself prove it!" A voice then came forth from heaven saying: "Why do you dispute with Rabbi Eliezer? The law does agree with him in every case." Rabbi Joshua then stood up and said: "It is not in heaven!" What did he mean by "not in heaven?" Rabbi Jeremiah said: "The Torah was given on Mount Sinai; the voice from heaven does not concern us because it is written in the Torah on Mount Sinai: "After the majority one must decide." (Exodus 25.2)

*Talmud Bava Metzia 59a*

## The Noah Affair

A poem by Richard E. Sherwin

cut noah some slack  
over a hundred years to  
grow the bloody wood  
and then to hammer thumbs and  
nails together so

stinking noisy cells  
can float the seasick year he  
feeds and scrapes the food  
and crap of all creation  
while rains beat hell down with not

a one of all his  
friends acquaintances and all  
their company of  
ridicule alone alive  
unwanted patriarch who'd

not plant vines first or  
soon and drink his memories  
away till naked  
as the Lord has left him his  
sons can cover up his name

## Who Owns and Who is Responsible for a Soul?

### **An Inquiry Based on Extrapolations of Exodus 22:6-14 and Bava Metzia 78b-83a**

By Elihu Gevirtz

A young man lost his father who died young. Bereft and alone, he spoke with his Rabbi who told him that his father's soul was God's, and just as the land must go back to its original owner in the Jubilee Year (Leviticus 25:8-13), so must each person's soul. The young man answered, "But God gave my father his soul for safe keeping, and it was stolen. The Torah says that if the thief is caught, he shall pay double! (Exodus 22:6) I say to you that God himself is the thief! and must make restitution and pay double to me!! And if for some reason unknown to me, God is not the thief that I say he is, he must tell me that he did not lay hands on my father's soul!" (Exodus 22:7)

The Rabbi finished the young man's quote of Torah with "then the case of both parties shall come before God: he whom God declares guilty shall pay double to the other." (Exodus 22:8) And what if your father is guilty of not taking good care of his soul or his body either by loss or negligence?" asked the Rabbi. The young man retorted "And what if he's not guilty? Besides, this is surely a mistrial for God claims to be both owner and judge. He cannot be impartial!" The Rabbi replied: "he may not be impartial, but he is both owner and judge."

But the son continued: "The human soul is entitled to more than 50 years. I estimate that the term of his contract was for 80 years! And therefore, the return of the property to its original owner in the Jubilee year had to be postponed in accordance with the law. So he should be alive today!" (Bava Metzia 79a. This tractate discusses responsibilities of the owner and the guardian, borrower, and renter of livestock and other objects. The young man is applying the tractate's discussion to the question of responsibility for human souls.) The Rabbi said "you have a good argument. Let me see the contract." The son of course

had none.

The son continued: "My father had not finished the mitzvah of telling me the story of the Exodus." (Exodus 13:8) The Rabbi replied: "In truth, he told you that story many times as you grew up, did he not?" The young man nodded in agreement. The Rabbi asked, "Can you hear his voice telling you the story?" The young man replied: "It's a struggle." The Rabbi said, "So was getting everyone out of Egypt." The son smiled and said: "My father borrowed his soul from God, but God was the owner, and further, he controlled the terms of the agreement."

The Rabbi countered, "I agree God was and is the owner. But wouldn't you say that God was with your father's soul while he was alive? If this is the case, no restitution is required." (Exodus 22:14) The young man responded: "He was negligent in that he gave my father a body that would die so young. God is guilty and must provide compensation for the lost property." "And what would that be the Rabbi asked?" The son replied: "Let me hear my father's voice double the number of times that I heard it while I was alive." The Rabbi said "That's up to you and your father's soul." The son asked: "Then how can God be the owner if he can't control the volume of my father's voice as he speaks to me from heaven?" The Rabbi said: "God is the owner of all souls. How well we hear is up to us."

The Rabbi then asked him a series of questions based on the Talmud (Bava Metzia 78b-83a): "Are we guardians of our souls? Are we paid guardians or unpaid guardians? If we are allowed to use them, do we borrow them (without paying for them)? Or do we rent them (paying the owner for our use of them)? Do we agree to take responsibility for them? What does that responsibility entail?" The young man was uncertain and asked if he could sit and study with the Rabbi, to which the Rabbi agreed.

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